NOVA SCOTIA Government of Nova Scotia

# Portia White Prize to George Elliott Clarke

**Department of Education and Culture (to July 99)**
**February 4, 1998 10:00**

George Elliott Clarke, distinguished Nova Scotian poet, essayist and exponent of black culture, today became the first recipient of the Portia White Prize, an annual award of $25,000 to recognize cultural and artistic excellence.

The Nova Scotia Arts Council/Conseil des arts de la Nouvelle-Ecosse presented the newly created award, named after one of the province's pre-eminent music pioneers, at a special ceremony in Province House.

Born in 1960 in Windsor Plains, N.S., and an alumnus of both Waterloo and Dalhousie universities, Mr. Clarke is currently teaching English and Canadian studies at Duke University in North Carolina.

He is well known in Nova Scotia for his poetry collections Whylah Falls (1990), Saltwater Spirituals and Deeper Blues (1993), and Lush Dreams, Blue Exile (1994), in addition to his many essays and contributions to anthologies.

The prize is named for Portia White, a Nova Scotia artist who persevered through adversity to achieve international acclaim as a classical singer on the great stages of Europe and North America. The daughter of a Baptist minister and one of 13 children, Ms. White was born in Truro in 1911. She was a schoolteacher in Africville before rising through hard work and dedication to become a world-renowned contralto.

After retiring from the stage and until her death in 1968, Ms. White devoted her time to teaching and coaching young singers. Her achievements stand as a model to all Nova Scotians and continue to instil a sense of pride in the African Nova Scotian communities.

In presenting Mr. Clarke with the award, Premier Russell MacLellan said:

"The timing of the award could not be more perfect. Earlier this morning, I added my voice and my signature to proclaim February as African Heritage Month. Now we honour Portia White -- an individual whose lifetime achievement and legacy contributed so much to African heritage and to Nova Scotia."

The premier also commented on the prize winner: "Dr. Clarke was selected because he represents one of our best. As such, he is honoured with the most prestigious award that can be presented in Nova Scotia to a Nova Scotian artist. We believe the stature of the Portia White Prize earns it a place on any mantle beside the Governor General's Award, the Chalmers Award, the Molson Prize, and others."

In recalling Ms. White's memory, Robbie Harrison, Minister of Education and Culture, said:

"She is a woman remembered for her faith and generosity to others -- a woman who struggled through adversity, but was yet described as 'a great Nova Scotian and a wonderfully talented, warm personality,' 'always smiling, charming, and friendly.'

"She was a teacher who made a difference in the lives of her students. After her death, one young singer paid this simple and touching tribute: I will never find a teacher like her again.' We will never find another Portia White. But she will always be remembered, and she will always be an inspiration to our artists and to all Nova Scotians."

In accepting the award, Mr. Clarke said: "I would like to thank Mr. Ron Bourgeois and the members of the jury of the Nova Scotia Arts Council/Conseil des arts de la Nouvelle-Ecosse for this splendid honour. The Portia White Prize preserves and honours the name of one of our province's -- and one of Canada's -- principal artists, one whose work is a beacon of accomplishment. I am deeply humbled by this award, especially given that it bears the name of my late great-aunt. I would also like to thank the Eastern Front Theatre for the honour of my nomination.

"I would also like to thank Premier Russell MacLellan and his government for demonstrating their commitment to the arts in our province by establishing the Portia White Prize. It is a rare and courageous act, for, in our freshly Philistine era, culture and education are often attacked -- foolishly -- as frills."

After the official ceremony in the Red Chamber of Province House to confer the prize, a reception was held in Mr. Clarke's honour.

-30-

Contact: Christopher Majka
Nova Scotia Arts Council
902-425-3725.

NOTE TO EDITORS: For Mr. Clarke's biography, please e-mail rossng@gov.ns.ca or call collect 902-424-4492.

ngr Feb. 4, 1998 10:00 a.m.

---

This page and all contents Crown copyright © 2006, Province of Nova Scotia, all rights reserved. Please send comments to Communications Nova Scotia: release@gov.ns.ca

Privacy